

# HURRICANE MITCH RECONSTRUCTION UPDATE



## USAID/Nicaragua Hurricane Mitch Reconstruction Program

(U.S. Millions of Dollars)	\$103.6
Public Health	30.6
Economic Reactivation	53.5
Disaster Mitigation	6.6
Education	4.5
Municipal Infrastructure	2.9
Transparency and Accountability	1.0
Food Aid	4.5



Departments of Nicaragua  
Affected by Hurricane Mitch

## CERTIFIED, IMPROVED SEEDS INCREASE YIELDS FOR FARMERS

### Guadalupe Abajo, Nicaragua—

While many of his neighbors lost their bean crops at the beginning of the 2001 planting season from drought, Mario Lopez stood proudly, nearly knee high in bean plants, surveying his flourishing crop. Lopez is one of 30 farmers participating in a USAID-financed program to produce certified seed in this rural community, located in a major basic grains producing area.

The \$625,000 Seed Improvement Project, known by its Spanish acronym, PROMESA, promotes the planting of improved, certified seeds to increase yields. The seeds, while costing more than seeds traditionally planted by Nicaraguan farmers, are more drought and disease resistant. Producers using certified seeds have been able, in many cases to triple yields.



The USAID-funded PROMESA Program helped 220 farmers produce certified seeds in the department of Matagalpa.



With certified bean seeds, farmers like Mario Lopez, have higher yields and better market prices.

The PROMESA project is also working with Nicaragua's Agricultural Ministry, (MAG-FOR), and private seed companies to improve farmers' access to certified seed of improved varieties. Along with the improved seeds, farmers receive technical assistance. MAG-FOR held workshops to accredit seed laboratories, crop research centers and seed field inspectors. As a result of these activities, hundreds of seed producers in Nicaragua's northern departments produced certified seed of improved varieties on more than 1,700 acres of farmland in the year 2000.

In the department of Matagalpa, 220 farmers are participating in the PROMESA seed production program. After the total destruction of their crops following Hurricane Mitch, these producers

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## CERTIFIED, IMPROVED SEEDS INCREASE YIELDS...

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have been able, by planting improved seeds, to recover from their losses and actually improve production despite two years of drought.

On her small one and a half acre plot, Thelma Bendaña harvested 17 hundred-weights of beans under drought conditions after planting certified seeds. Before, even under the most favorable conditions, the most she could expect from a harvest was five hundredweights of beans.

"We had a great harvest. These beans are a thousand times better than what we were planting before," said Bendaña.

Bendaña was able to sell her certified bean seed at about 36 percent more than the market price for non certified grain. She was able to pay back a loan for the seeds, replant, and have a small profit left to help maintain her family of eight.

The Ochoa brothers are also convinced of the benefits of the improved seeds. They watched as their neighbors lost this year's crops to a drought.

"Even with the drought, we harvested when everyone else lost crops. Imagine what kind of a harvest we'll have during a normal rainy season," said German Ochoa.

Although some aspects of the PROMESA project, under USAID's Hurricane Mitch Reconstruction Program, will end December 31 of this year, the program leaves behind the beginnings of a national seed policy



*Thelma Bendaña plans to improve her home from profits she has made by planting certified seeds.*

that promotes the private sector production of high quality certified seed and new varieties, while public institutions concentrate on research on seed varieties and hybrids and on regulatory responsibilities.

More important, the PROMESA program convinced many Nicaraguan small producers to plant improved seeds. The success that those farmers had will serve as a model for other producers and a source of certified seeds.

Mario Lopez's farm is one of the best examples in Guadalupe Abajo of the benefits of planting certified seeds.

"These seeds are drought resistant, disease resistant and have very high yields," said Lopez. "And we get much better prices."

Lopez has been able to recover his losses from Hurricane Mitch and the profits from sales have allowed him to fix his house and help put four children (at the same time) through college.



*The Ochoa brothers survived a drought at the beginning of the planting season by using certified drought and plague resistant seeds.*

***"Even with the drought, we harvested when everyone else lost crops. Imagine what kind of a harvest we'll have during a normal rainy season."***

*German Ochoa, on the benefits of planting certified seeds*



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